

Recommendation 4: Enhance watershed planning, coordination, and implementation by creating goals and strategies referencing land use for each of Iowa's six major river basins and three major river regions.

Recommendation 4 satisfies the following task charged to the Iowa Smart Planning Task Force in SF2389:

Develop a model for regional comprehensive planning for Iowa and recommend partnerships between state agencies, local governments, educational institutions, and research facilities.

Background

Iowans have been engaged in numerous water related task forces in the past decade and the overarching theme that has emerged from each is that planning for water based issues needs to take place on a watershed basis. As a result of the 2007 Watershed Quality Planning Task Force report the Water Resources Coordinating Council (WRCC) was established in 2008 to coordinate the work of state and federal agencies in watershed work. The Task Force report identified the need for \$5 million annually to carry out HUC-8* watershed assessment, planning, and prioritization. The same report identified a need of \$2-5 million for planning and implementation in each of the state's 1700 HUC-12* sub-watersheds. Federal and state agencies are carrying out this effort now, but additional resources would fulfill the need to take this to the level recommended by every task force (including the WRCC Flood Plain Task Force) that has been convened in the past 10-12 years. The Watershed Planning Advisory Council (WPAC) was established in 2010 to provide a mechanism for interested stakeholders to make watershed related recommendations to the WRCC, the Legislature, and the Governor. The varied makeup of each council provides an opportunity for coordination among agencies and stakeholders to improve watershed planning and implementation.

Proposal

The Committee recommends that watershed planning be coordinated by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) in conjunction with the Iowa Flood Center, the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS), the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Attention should be focused on creation of goals and strategies for each of the six major river basins and three major river regions in Iowa (see map) and exchange information and recommendations with community planners, COGs, and local governments for integration of watershed strategies into smart comprehensive land use plans. A coordinator should be assigned to each basin and region to lead planning efforts, coordinate across political boundaries, and translate technical information. The six major river basins are the Cedar, Iowa, Lower Des Moines/ Upper Chariton, Skunk, Upper Des Moines/ Raccoon, and the Wapsipinicon. The three major river regions include Northeast Iowa, Northwest Iowa, and Southwest Iowa.

Justification

- Few decisions have as big an impact on the volume of runoff, water quality, and the sustainability of water resources as land use, yet these water related concerns are often disconnected in terms of comprehensive land use planning. Developing watershed plans that specifically identify critical land use issues, opportunities, and goals will help planners create more integrated and effective regional comprehensive smart plans.
- Consideration of watershed goals fosters stewardship of resources and a greater collaboration between neighboring regions.
- Connecting watershed issues with land use will help mitigate and prepare for flooding hazards.
- Goals and strategies prepared by the Iowa DNR and other stakeholders provide scientific data on which COGs and local governments can base floodplain land use, significantly streamlining the workload of regional and local governments in addressing catastrophic flooding.
- Coordination of visioning and planning should be done throughout the river basin or river region to ensure compatibility with watershed planning and smart comprehensive land use plans throughout the basins and regions. It is recommended that more detailed planning take place in HUC-8 sub-basins. These HUC-8 plans can be incorporated into regional planning processes.
- HUC-8 plans should be further refined by planning implementation of watershed protection projects at a scale no larger than HUC-12 sub-watersheds. HUC-8 planning should prioritize and target HUC-12 sub-watersheds with the most opportunity for flood reduction and water quality improvement for implementation projects.

Action Steps (Legislative/ Administrative)

- Add a requirement for watershed plans (with elements to be determined by IDNR and others) to the Iowa Code.
- The Governor should assign a watershed advocate to assist the WRCC and the WPAC with their work, to carry out these recommendations and to oversee basin coordination and basin planning. Appropriate funding needs to accompany such a position.
- An intensive strategic review of watershed planning and implementation should take place and involve significant watershed related partners from federal, state, and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, and institutions. Such a review would, at a minimum, identify a collective vision for watershed programs, inventory existing watershed programs, highlight gaps and duplications of existing programs, and establish steps necessary to realize the collective vision for watershed planning and implementation.
- Watershed planning, targeting, and implementation require skilled staff to deliver plans acceptable to a broad range of stakeholders and that are targeted to priority landscape issues. The State needs to provide adequate funding that maintains and enhances a watershed delivery system that meets these goals.

References

- Local Government Commission. *Water Resources and Land Use Planning: Watershed-based Strategies for Venture County*. (2008)
- Genesee Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council. *Keuka Lake Watershed Land Use Planning Guide- An Intermunicipal Action Strategy*. (2009)
- Clallam County, WA. *Elwha-Dungeness Watershed Plan- Land Use and Land Management Recommendations*. (2005)
- Connecticut watershed plans - http://www.ct.gov/dep/cwp/view.asp?a=2719&q=335504&depNav_GID=1654
- Michigan watershed plans - http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,1607,7-135-3313_3682_3714_4012-95955--,00.html

* A Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) is a U.S. Geological Survey term/method for identifying watersheds throughout the world; the larger the digit, the smaller the watershed. A HUC-8 ranges in size from 500,000 to 2 million acres and is generally considered a watershed. A HUC-12 ranges in size from 10,000-40,000 acres and is generally considered a sub-watershed. Combinations of HUC-8 watersheds that lead from one to another are generally considered basins. For example, the Cedar basin is made up of six HUC-8 watersheds. There are approximately 56 HUC-8 watersheds in Iowa and approximately 1700 HUC-12 sub-watersheds.